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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 YEREVAN 000865

SIPDIS

G/TIP FOR AMBASSADOR CDEBACA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KTIP](#) [KWMN](#) [TU](#) [AM](#)  
SUBJECT: DEPUTY PM DISCUSSES TRAFFICKING, INVITES AMB  
CDEBACA TO ARMENIA

REF: A. YEREVAN 832  
[1](#)B. YEREVAN 771

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Classified By: AMB Marie L. Yovanovitch, for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

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SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (C) On November 25 Ambassador Yovanovitch met with Deputy Prime Minister Armen Gevorgian to discuss Armenia's current anti-trafficking efforts. The Ambassador emphasized that Armenia needed to continue the positive momentum it had achieved with its improved ranking last year, and that now was not the time for Armenia to rest on its laurels. The Ambassador pressed the corruption case of the escaped trafficker Anush Zakharyants, stating that the December 2008 launch of a new criminal investigation was a major reason behind Armenia's improved ranking, and that Washington expects the corrupt officials involved to be identified, prosecuted, and punished. The Deputy PM stated that Armenia was committed to registering new progress in combating trafficking and that trafficking had become an increasingly important issue for the government. Gevorgian thought that "mentalities" about trafficking have begun to change for the better, and he previewed that the government would approve new criminal codes making it easier for law enforcement structures to prosecute and punish trafficking and that the anti-trafficking budget would be increased in 2010. He also welcomed a visit by Ambassador CdeBaca, saying it would help his efforts to further galvanize high-level government attention to combating trafficking, and said that he was interested in better cooperation with Turkey on trafficking cases. END SUMMARY.

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"MOVING OFF THE TIER TWO WATCH LIST CAN BE DANGEROUS ..."  
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[1](#)2. (C) On November 25 the Ambassador invited Deputy Prime Minister Armen Gevorgian to lunch to discuss, among other things, Armenia's current anti-trafficking efforts. (Note: Gevorgian is the Chairperson of Armenian's Ministerial Council to Combat Trafficking in Persons. End Note.) The Ambassador recounted to Gevorgian her recent trip to Washington and meeting with the Department's new Ambassador to Combat Trafficking, Luis CdeBaca, and Ambassador CdeBaca's caution that "moving off the Tier Two Watch List can be a dangerous time for countries" lest they think they can rest on their laurels. Ambassador Yovanovitch stressed the importance of Armenia sustaining its recent momentum, and highlighted the outstanding corruption case of the escaped Uzbek trafficker Anush Zakharyants, stating that the December 2008 launch of a new criminal investigation was one of the

major factors behind Armenia's improved ranking. (Note: The Prosecutor General's special assistant confidentially informed PolFSN on December 7 that Zakharyants might have been recently located in Kazakhstan -- where there is an outstanding Interpol warrant out for her arrest--and that Armenia is preparing an extradition request for her return. End Note.) The Ambassador said Washington is closely following the developments in the case, and expects Armenia to eventually identify, prosecute, and punish those officials responsible for the 2006 escape. The Ambassador shared with Gevorgian Ambassador CdeBaca's 2006 prosecution of an ICE immigration inspector involved in trafficking in persons, and noted that while it was hard for him to do, it was the right thing to do -- and what Washington hoped Armenia would do on the Zakharyants case.

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TRAFFICKING INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT  
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¶3. (C) The Deputy PM assured the Ambassador of the GOAM's commitment to continued progress in combating trafficking. He noted that in two days' time he was convening the Ministerial Council on Trafficking where the Council would discuss draft amendments to the criminal code making it easier for law enforcement to prosecute and punish trafficking crimes. He also previewed that the Cabinet of Ministers on November 26 would review a government decree (executive order) that would make it easier for the government to redirect anti-trafficking funding to other trafficking projects in the event of allocation conflicts. (Note: Gevorgian was referring to 2009 budget funding allocated by the GOAM to co-fund the operations of an NGO shelter for victims of trafficking that went unspent once the NGO informed the GOAM it did not need the funds. Because of

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the rigidity of the spending process, the GOAM was unable to reroute these funds to other anti-trafficking programs. End Note.)

¶4. (C) Gevorgian thanked the Ambassador for the USG's constant attention and support of Armenia's anti-trafficking efforts, and opined that it had played the key role in making trafficking a priority issue for the GOAM. He said "it wasn't the case four years ago that trafficking was so frequently discussed in the government" as it is today. He added that both President Sargsian and Prime Minister Sargsian (no relation) had separately noted Armenia's improved State Department ranking, and he believed it was this ranking that had helped him increase the anti-trafficking funding in the 2010 budget. Gevorgian said it was "a huge fight" with other agencies to increase this funding, and that he had a hard time convincing his colleagues that foreigners "not only observe what we do with legislation, but how we provide concrete resources" to combat trafficking. Gevorgian said he hopes to lobby in 2010 for a single line item allocation in the 2011 budget for anti-trafficking programs in general that could later be divided up and spent merely with government decrees, a process that would help him spend trafficking monies more easily.

¶5. (C) Gevorgian opined that "mentalities" about trafficking inside law enforcement structures (police, prosecutors, judges) have dramatically changed for the better in the last couple of years, as witnessed by more aggressive prosecutions and stiffer punishments for trafficking. He acknowledged, however, that there is still room for progress, and predicted that "if we continue at this pace, in two to three years" Armenia's increasingly tough stand against trafficking will become a "permanent" phenomenon. Gevorgian said he was also delighted to see expanded cooperation and increased confidence between law enforcement and NGOs on trafficking issues.

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16. (C) When Ambassador Yovanovitch mentioned that she had invited Ambassador CdeBaca to Armenia to discuss Armenia's anti-trafficking efforts, Gevorgian said the GOAM would be "delighted" to receive and work with Ambassador CdeBaca. Gevorgian then stated that "the visit will be useful for me and for other officials, as such a visit will show 'them' (other high-ranking GOAM officials) the continued attention of the international community" to Armenia's trafficking efforts. The Deputy PM added that such a visit would be of particular help to him on the funding front, and that he would ask Ambassador CdeBaca to stress "in front of my colleagues" the importance of Armenia dedicating its own financial resources to combating trafficking.

ZAKHARYANTS CASE -- NO NEW DEVELOPMENTS

17. (C) Gevorgian said he had no new information on the status of the criminal investigation into the Zakharyants case. He said Gevorg Kostanian, one of President Sargsian's legal advisers, was in charge of overseeing the GOAM's handling of the investigation. Gevorgian pledged to obtain a progress report for the Ambassador next time he meets with Kostanian. (Note: During the Embassy's December 10 reception honoring International Human Rights Day, the Ambassador hand-delivered a letter to Prosecutor General Aghvan Hovsepian in which she conveyed the USG's continued interest in the case and our expectation that the corrupt officials involved in the 2006 escape be identified, prosecuted, and punished. The letter noted the launch of the criminal investigation in December 2008, and the US government's hopes that it would result in a positive conclusion in the near future. End Note.)

YES TO ANTI-TIP COOPERATION WITH TURKEY

18. (C) The Ambassador noted that the police and the MFA had recently approached the Embassy to support Turkish-Armenian law enforcement cooperation on an alleged trafficking case involving the ethnic Armenian/naturalized Turkish citizen Gohar (Kilinc) Kirakosyan residing in Trabzon, Turkey. The Ambassador told Gevorgian that she had discussed the request with the Prosecutor General and Minister of Justice (reftels), and both said they welcomed anything the US embassies in Yerevan and Ankara could do to support

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cooperation on the case. The Ambassador said it was important that the case be a solid one, and that Armenia be prepared for full disclosure of the case materials before the embassies get involved as advocates for cooperation. Gevorgian responded that he was for greater cooperation with the two main destination countries for Armenian trafficking victims of sexual exploitation -- the UAE and Turkey -- and that he would try to help move the process along with both. On Turkey, however, he said he would have to consult with President Sargsian first to ensure he didn't have any issues with Armenian law enforcement fully engaging their Turkish counterparts. (Note: Post has anecdotally heard that all cross-border initiatives with Turkey initiated by Armenian entities must be vetted by the Presidency. To date, we have no indications that the Presidency has rejected anything. End Note.)

COMMENT

19. (C) Post has no doubt that the driving force behind Armenia's campaign to improve its anti-trafficking posture in the last 18 months is Deputy Prime Minister Gevorgian. As

soon as he assumed office in April 2009, and also assumed the Chairmanship of the newly established Ministerial Council to Combat Trafficking, the GOAM dramatically changed its course and became more proactive, allocating multiple funding streams for anti-trafficking in its annual budget, getting law enforcement to be more aggressive in prosecuting and punishing trafficking, and finally instituting a National Referral Mechanism. We agree with Gevorgian that a visit by Ambassador CdeBaca would help galvanize even greater high-level attention for anti-trafficking efforts, and at a pivotal moment when government and law enforcement mentalities are finally changing for the better in recognizing trafficking as a real problem. Against this backdrop, Post hopes that Ambassador CdeBaca will consider Deputy Prime Minister Gevorgian's invitation to visit Armenia, as we think such a visit could accomplish a great deal--not only on the funding, resources, and political will front, but also in impressing upon the Armenians the importance of finally punishing the corrupt officials in the Zakharyants case.

YOVANOVITCH